

FINAL THESIS ACCEPTANCE RECORD SHEET

Parents' Wants and Needs

from a Childcare Center

Lori Kerr

Parents' Wants and Needs From a Childcare Center

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Thesis Committee

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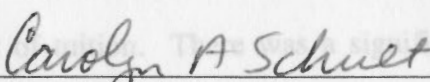
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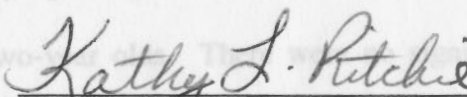
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Abstract

A sincere thank you goes to Dr. Carolyn Schult, my thesis advisor, for all her patience and assistance in completing this project. She was always available for support and guidance when it was needed. Thank you also to Dr. Kathy Ritchie and Dr. Catherine Borshuk for their time and efforts in being on my thesis committee. All of their help and advice helped make this a reality and a success.

A study was completed that looked at one particular childcare center in the local area to see what qualities parents valued in a child care center. A survey was sent out to the parents who enrolled their children there. The parents were asked to rate on a Likert Scale the importance of a number of qualities of a childcare center. A total of 34 outcomes measures were examined. It was found that when looking for a childcare center, parents had the best interest of the child before their own. The variables the parents rated most highly were safety, the presence of an educational program, and cleanliness, while the lowest were recommendation by a friend/relative, the toys available to the children, and the cost of tuition. There was a significant difference found between the kindergarten and two-year old group. The parents of the kindergarteners stated that safety and program goals were not as important to them as they were to the parents of the two-year olds. There were no significant differences found in regards to program goals and teacher qualifications.

Acknowledgements

A sincere thank you goes to Dr. Carolyn Schult, my thesis advisor, for all her patience and assistance in completing this project. She was always available for support and guidance when it was needed. Thank you also to Dr. Kathy Ritchie and Dr. Catherine Borshuk for their time and efforts in being on my thesis committee. All of their help and advice helped make this a reality and a success.

I would like to say a very special thank you to my husband, Mike, and my son, Payton. Their persistence and encouragement is what made this a reality for me. Without their support, this may have never come about. Thank you.

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Definitions

There are many different types of childcare that will be discussed throughout this paper, and oftentimes it can be confusing trying to understand the different types. Childcare refers to any care for the child other than parental care. There are many types of childcare parents may chose from, such as nannies, church setting, and using a babysitter

The number of children in day care has grown substantially within the past decades due to increased single parenthood and maternal employment (Belsky & Steinberg, 1978). In 1995, 10% of infants, 25% of toddlers, and almost 40% of three-year-olds attended center-based facilities in the United States (Burchinal, Roberts, Riggins, Zeisel, Neebe, & Bryant, 2000). Nearly 11 million preschool-aged children need a childcare facility while the parents work (Kisker, Maynard, Gordon, & Strain, 1989). Almost two-thirds of mothers with preschool children are in the work force and the number continues to grow with the largest proportions of these children attending a center-based facility (Waite, Leibowitz, & Witsberger, 1991). Kisker et al. (1989) also report that about half of all preschool children not in maternal care are cared for by a relative, while the remaining half are divided between a family member's home (22%), day care centers (23%), and an unrelated care giver's home (6%). Childcare is a large part of a child's life in the American family today, regardless of what type of care is given. The family member could be an immediate family member (e.g., grandparent) or a

The task of choosing a childcare center is not an easy one. Numerous thoughts and expectations are put into that decision. How is the decision made as to which type of childcare is chosen? It is one that affects the whole family for a long period of time; financially, physically, and emotionally (Belsky & Steinberg, 1978).

Definitions

There are many different types of childcare that will be discussed throughout this paper, and oftentimes it can be confusing trying to understand the different types. Childcare refers to any care for the child other than parental care. There are many types of childcare parents may choose from, such as nannies, church setting, and using a babysitter

in the child's home. However, I will only focus on the three most popular choices: center care, family care, and home-based care. The following definitions of these terms will explain how I am using them in the study. Other researchers may have slightly different ways of explaining them.

Center care (Center-based facility)

Center care refers to any child attending a center-based facility, which is a licensed facility that abides by state guidelines in caring for children. They vary by state. There are guidelines pertaining to health and safety, ratios of staff to children, group sizes, staff training, and required play materials. These also incorporate the number of hours a child may attend a center in a given day. This does not include home-based daycares. They have a different licensing procedure.

Family Care

Family care refers to a family member caring for a child in or out of the family home. The family member could be an immediate family member (e.g., grandparent) or a more distant relative (e.g., cousin, great aunt). The child is not at home with the parent, but a noncustodial relative cares for the child. Normally, the only other children being cared for in this setting would be the children of the caregiver. Watching any other children would be considered a home-based care center.

Home-Based Care

Home-based care is when a child is cared for in a home of a non-family member. Oftentimes home-based care centers have many children of various ages from many different families. All home-based care homes need to be licensed by the state if they service over five children, including infants. The guidelines for these homes are

extremely different from a licensed childcare center. For example, they are usually exempt from state inspection because of the number of children for which they care. Many of them have fewer than six children or do not report the exact number of children being cared for to the licensure. They also oftentimes have food subsidies to help supplement the costs of running the business.

Why Parents Chose a Particular Child Care Center

Parents put their children in childcare for three major reasons, the first being maternal employment in single parent families (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986) or dual income families. Childcare is a necessity for these families. The second reason parents carefully choose the appropriate childcare is to enhance the children's development, whether it is social, emotional, or cognitive. This can be done best by attending a high-quality center. The final reason for children attending childcare is the diversity associated with it. Parents want their children mainstreamed with different ethnicities and those who are economically disadvantaged (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). By being mainstreamed, children have the opportunity to interact with children from all backgrounds, learn different cultures, and develop new ideas and feelings for others. There may be other reasons that daycare centers are used. For example, some families who do not need care decide to put their children in childcare for personal reasons, such as having some private time.

Parents who make the choice as to what form of childcare to use and why base it on personal decisions pertaining to what they feel meets the needs of their family. The common perception among parents in America is that there is quite a concern over the inadequate supply of care, the levels of quality, and the cost of the care (Kisker et al., 1989). Parents need to decide if it is wise to go back in the work force when faced with

this obstacle. With the high cost of care and the varying levels of quality, can parents afford it? Parents again need to decide what is important to them and what works best for their family. There are three major deciding factors that parents state as being important in choosing a childcare facility. They are cost, quality, and location.

Parents want a safe, inviting, clean and healthy environment for their children, but oftentimes other factors overrun this. One factor in determining childcare is cost. Cost is a deciding factor for most families' decision in determining a childcare choice for their child/children (Atkinson, 1987; Herscovitch, 1996; Hofferth, Brayfield, Deitch, & Holcomb, 1991; Lein, 1979). The average annual cost of childcare is ten percent of the average family income, roughly \$3150 in 1994 (Taylor, Galinsky, Helborne, & Culin, 1994). Because the cost is so high, childcare is limited to what is affordable to that particular family. This may mean sacrificing one's wishes and desires for that important choice. The less one pays for childcare, the more the likelihood grows that one is receiving poorer quality care (Hair-Hunts, 1994; Taylor et. al., 1994). Only families with higher incomes choose center-based care (Hair-Hunts, 1994), while lower-income families tend to choose relatives and home-based care for their children (Herscovitch, 1996). Single mothers come across this problem more than dual income families because of numerous financial obligations they need to fulfill alone.

Kisker et al. (1989) found that in three metropolitan cities, an average of 25% of the mother's annual income was spent on childcare. The amount of earnings spent on childcare overall ranged from 2 percent to 96 percent. Some of these mothers qualified for state assistance and basically all of their earnings went for childcare. Due to the high cost of childcare, these parents have smaller proportions available for other expenses,

such as utilities, food, clothing, and rent. Since childcare is so expensive to these mothers, they are more likely to choose home-based care because of the lower expense and because there is usually availability for all the children in the family who need care (Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996). Availability is an important issue with parents in finding care for their children (Johansen et al., 1996).

Along with cost, quality is a major factor with parents in deciding where to send their children for childcare. An unfortunate finding is that higher quality of care is associated with a higher cost in regards to childcare centers (Hair-Hunts, 1994; Hofferth et al., 1991; Kisker et al., 1996; Lein, 1979; Scarr, 1998). Quality is one of the most important factors in deciding on a childcare arrangement when the mother was employed rather than unemployed, (42% vs. 27%; Hofferth et al., 1991). Sixty percent of parents who used center programs or family care stated that at least one aspect of quality was important to them in choosing a particular arrangement (Hofferth et al., 1991).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a national accreditation system to establish and make known quality child care programs in the nation. They have a list of items that help make for a high quality center, which includes: warm interactions among children and adults, planned learning activities, specially trained teachers, correct child to staff ratio, age-appropriate materials, healthy and safe learning environment, communication with parents, effective administration, and ongoing evaluations. Many of these things are important to parents when looking for alternate care for their children (Atkinson, 1987; Lein, 1979; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). There is a growing number of studies that show that the quality of care is related to the long term care outcome of health, safety, and

development of the child (Kisker et al., 1989). High quality centers often have low staff turnovers (Scarr, 1998). When there are numerous staff changes, the children have less opportunity to develop meaningful and prosperous relationships with the teachers and caregivers. Stability is essential for children to feel safe and happy outside the home.

Another characteristic that is cited often is for the provider to be warm and loving to the children. In Hofferth et al.'s (1991) study, seventy percent of parents surveyed rated this most important overall, including the families with unemployed mothers and employed mothers. Overall, the level of satisfaction parents had with their current providers was extremely high, (96%). The parents in this study indicated that they were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied".

As the trend suggests, the quality of care given in childcare has increased overall due to the increased education of the providers and the training given to and required by the providers (Hofferth et al., 1991). In 1990, 42% of providers in center-based programs had at least 16 years of education, compared to 29% in 1977. This is comforting to parents who leave their child with strangers for long periods of time. This could also be a reason for the high cost of childcare. Since the average number of years of schooling is 16, this implies that the providers have attended some sort of college, therefore requiring a larger salary to keep them employed with benefits. Up to approximately 70% of the cost of running a childcare facility is devoted to staff salaries (Morris & Helburn, 1996). This in turn raises the cost of tuition.

Atkinson (1987) was interested in the quality and philosophy of centers, since many centers have common characteristics such as number of children and staff make-up. She conducted a study to examine center services, program goals, and teacher

qualifications. Mothers' most common reasons for choosing a particular childcare center were parental convenience and the location of the center. Financial reasons and quality of the programs provided came in second, followed by the quality of the staff and physical facilities provided. Mothers also rated how well their needs as well as their child's needs were met in the center in question. Overall, mothers were satisfied with their childcare choice and would probably recommend it to a friend. Parents, more likely than not, relied on recommendations from friends and families as being a source of information and guidance in choosing an alternative.

Endsley, Bradbard, and Readdick (1984) concluded that the four most frequently cited reasons for choosing a childcare center were the program offered, location of the center, recommendation of friends, and the hours of operation. They also stated in turn that these specific criteria, minus recommendation from friends, were correlated with the quality of care received.

When parents were interested in a change in care, as 26% of the parents were in Hofferth et al.'s (1991) study, the main reason was for a higher quality of care. Families with employed mothers wanted program changes, such as cognitive and social development and school preparation issues. Families with unemployed mothers wanted a more warm and loving environment, child/staff ratios and other program-related items (Hofferth et al., 1991).

Along with cost and quality, the third major reason parents choose a childcare arrangement is location/convenience (Atkinson, 1987; Endsley et al., 1984; Hair-Hunts, 1994; Herscovitch, 1996; Hofferth et al.; Kisker et al., 1989; Lein, 1979). Families today are much more busy then they were in the past. This could be due to various reasons,

such as more single-parent working families, and more dual income families. So, time to them is extremely important. Having the children attend a childcare facility close to home or work would enable families to spend more time at home together as a family. Space availability is an important issue with parents in finding care for their children (Johansen et al., 1996). The cost of finding numerous childcare sites can be expensive; therefore, finding one site is the most efficient way. This also allows the family to have one drop off/pick up destination instead of several. Many parents opt to have their children attend a home-based care center because of the increased space availability and lower cost compared to center-based care (Johansen et al., 1996). meet the need of the family. Johansen et al. (1996) asked, "What things influenced you most in choosing childcare arrangements for your child or children?" of 710 working mothers. All families mentioned convenience as their primary reason for choosing a particular center, meaning what was convenient for their lifestyle and family. This would probably enable parents to spend more time at home with their family. Higher paid mothers did not put much emphasis on the cost of care and relied more on the quality of care given to the children. Mothers who stated that educational features were important were more likely to put their child/children in a center-based facility, while the other mothers' first choice of care was family. The higher paid mothers were also the mothers who more than likely had a post high school education (Johansen, 1992). There are a lot of factors that go into deciding a childcare choice. Parents just need to see what best fits their needs and family lifestyle. availab Once parents find a site that is convenient for them, they need to be reassured that the facility will be available when it is needed. Along with location, reliability is a factor in determining a childcare site. Parents found the greatest form of reliability was in

connection with formal, full-time care for their children (Lein, 1979). The parents know the center will be open at the times specified, unless, for instance, there is a snow emergency. This is important for working parents who need reliable and dependable care for their children. One of the leading causes of stress to parents is related to childcare. Leading causes of this type of stress are illness and a provider who quits (Galinsky, 1992). When a provider quits unexpectedly, the parent is in a bind to find alternate care for their children, leaving them no choice but to take time off of work to do so. Having reliable providers leads to mothers staying in the work force (Collins & Hofferth, 1996) and limits absenteeism. The type of childcare not only has to meet the need of the family, but must allow parents to spend the most time possible with their children, rather than away from them.

Hofferth et al. (1991) looked at various aspects of childcare such as who uses childcare and why, the ages of parents who utilize its services, and, relevant to this study, the parents' perceptions of alternatives and reasons for choosing a particular provider. They concluded that parents do their homework, meaning they look into every alternative and make careful decisions when it comes to making such an important decision (Hofferth et al., 1991). In terms of the location and cost of the center, parents find this extremely important in the decision-making process. The families often choose an arrangement that is close to home and, ideally, one that minimizes tuition. These parents viewed relative or in-home care as not an option because a majority of the time it was not available to them; therefore, they relied mainly on center-based facilities. Finding the right childcare solution is a process that could take days, even weeks to accomplish. Booth (1992) added that hours of center operation was equally important. More of these

parents stated that the characteristics of a good provider were important: their warm and loving manner. Even though these are aspects that are important to parents, where they enroll their children does not always reflect their primary choice. Often there is limited availability and parents may need to wait until a opening comes available.

There are several factors other than cost, quality, and convenience that are also important to parents in choosing a childcare arrangement. Johansen et al. (1996) stated that parents use a variety of criteria when choosing a childcare situation that is appropriate for their family and lifestyle, the first being familiarity. Mothers were more likely to choose family care rather than a childcare center when they felt knowing the provider was an important factor in choosing a facility (Johansen, 1992). Knowing who is taking care of their children allows the parents the feeling of comfort and knowing their children are in good hands.

Lein (1979) looked at the reasons why a parent chose a particular childcare alternative. She discovered that parents are interested in cost, convenience, and the availability of a family member to watch the children. If a member of their family was willing to take care of the children, then these parents were more likely to use family rather than a center based facility. This has many implications: familiarity, more cost-efficient, and the location in reference to the family home. Cognitive development, and discipline and control were also mentioned as reasons for choosing a certain child care alternative (Lein, 1979).

One of the main reasons a family leaves a center their children currently attend is the lack of trust the parents have with the teachers, director, and the center in general (Herscovitch, 1996). In a study done by Herscovitch, low-income mothers were asked

why they chose one facility over another. Most of these mothers did not have their children in a formal child care setting because of the cost, although the mothers stated lack of trust in the facility as the reason for why they would not send their children to a public center. In conclusion, these mothers used relatives to care for their children in lieu of center-based facilities.

Although parents want the best for their children, sometimes they need to sacrifice that in order to fit the needs of the family. The major reasons for choosing a particular childcare center are cost, location, and convenience. These are not necessarily the most important qualities for parents, but are the ones most commonly cited. One reason for this is that the higher the quality, the higher the cost and that puts parents in a compromising situation. Many times parents cannot afford what is best for their children; therefore, they need to settle for what is affordable and best fits their needs. Parents may not always agree what determines a high quality center, but they are willing to send their children and pay the tuition for what they have chosen (Scarr, 1998).

Outcomes and Benefits of Children in Child Care Centers

The majority of children in childcare spend over 30 hours a week in center-based facilities (Schindler, Moely, & Frank, 1987). Since this is the case, it becomes the role of the provider to ensure that these children are getting the skills and interactions needed to develop and grow appropriately. These providers need to develop social, emotional and physical opportunities for these children to encounter. Schindler et al. (1987) showed that time spent in daycare was positively correlated with increased social participation and decreased onlooker behavior. These children have more opportunities for peer interaction than those of children who remain at home. This is probably due to the number of

children per classroom and that the children are primarily of the same age and developmental level, as opposed to children at home who have older or younger siblings.

In order for these children to prosper physically, emotionally, and socially in a healthy way, other resources need to be there as well. The quality of a childcare environment affects children primarily socially (Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987). The aspect of quality that promotes social development to its fullest is the conversations between the child and caregivers as well as between the children themselves. As language seems to promote social development, social interactions seem to promote language. (Vandell & Powers, 1983) and, are less likely to parallel play and interact more

with the. Because of increased social interactions, increased language development occurs (Aureli & Procacci, 1992). Children who are encouraged to participate in cooperative play with other children tend to have higher language ability. Aureli and Proacci (1992) looked at two groups of children aged 38-42 months, one group raised by family members and the other in day care for at least 2 years. They observed cooperative play between children in both groups. The researchers found that those children who attended day care used more language during the interactions than the children raised by family members. Though the language was not complex, it was simple enough for other preschoolers to understand. They also found that children attending day care facilities preferred child-child play, as opposed to the children at home who preferred parallel play. the center spends

on the. Quality of child-based childcare centers was looked at longitudinally relating to the cognitive development as well as language development in African-American children. Burchinal, Roberts, Riggins, Zeisel, Neebe, & Bryant (2000) found the quality of a childcare center was an excellent predictor of language and cognitive development

amongst African American children in the first few years of life. The higher the quality of care was, the more advanced the development (Burchinal, et al., 2000). This is due to many factors. Higher quality centers seem to have more supplies, a stimulating environment, better trained providers, a cleaner environment, and a lower staff-child ratio, the latter being the biggest predictor (Blau, 2000; NICHD, 2000). When the class sizes and ratio are smaller, more frequent, sensitive and positive care can be given to the children. The providers show fewer signs of stress and burn-out. As the providers tend to have less stress, the children as well seem to be more positive toward adults or providers (Vandell & Powers, 1983) and, are less likely to parallel play and interact more with their peers.

Overall care in childcare centers

NICHD (2000) concluded that the overall care for children in America aged 6 months to 3 years is "adequate", meaning not the best, and surely not the worst. Infant care quality seems to be the lowest of each age group (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996). Only about half of all licensed childcare centers in America provide infant care (Scarr, 1998). This is due to the high cost of having classrooms with low infant-to-provider ratios and the payroll to run them. Burchinal et al. (1996) found that the for-profit organizations provided poorer care than non-profit groups. The obvious reason for this is cost. It is expensive for centers to be of high quality. The more the center spends on the materials and concepts needed for high quality, the less profit the center will make. It depends on how much the owners and directors want to spend in running costs. That is not a comforting thought since millions of parents rely on these centers and programs for care for their children.

Since one of the qualities of a "good" quality childcare center is meeting the goals of the parents and meeting the children's needs, the current needs assessment study will explore the desires and requirements of parents whose children attend a local childcare center. It would seem logical to think that if the parents were not happy with their current childcare choice, then they would be elsewhere or actively looking for alternate care for their children. These parents may even voice their concerns with the management team. The current study will clear up this issue of how and why parents make their decisions regarding childcare arrangements.

This study looks at one particular child care center in the local area to see if it meets the parents' goals and needs in their current childcare choice.

Method

Participants

Parents with children in a local childcare organization were given surveys. There are two centers in the company, but I only used the center that has been operating since 1997. It services children aged six weeks through 12 years. The older center has a capacity of roughly 190 children, and currently serves 150 families, and is about 96% full. The other center, which opened in January 2001, was excluded from the study due to low enrollment (34 children) and various other confounding variables. The center is a for-profit organization.

The participants in the study were 3 males and 43 females. Of the 150 surveys distributed, 30.7% of the surveys were returned and used in the analysis. All of the surveys returned were included in the following analyses. Descriptive statistics were calculated for parents' education and income. Of all the parents who responded to the

survey, 67.4% had some type of education past a high school diploma (see Table 1). Also, of all the parents who returned surveys, 60% made above \$50,000 a year (see Table 2). There were no parents of infants who returned surveys for this study. The groups that had the most feedback were the preschool group with 29.5%, and those parents who have more than one child attending the center, 25%.

Instrument

The survey measured parents' judgments of the importance of certain qualities of a childcare center. Many aspects important to running a childcare center were measured, all of which had been identified in previous research as being important to parents, teachers and other childcare staff workers. In measuring parental needs, (1) cost, (2) reliability of care, (3) location, (4) interaction with staff and other families, (5) value agreement between center and parent, (6) recommended by a friend/relative, and (7) the hours of the center were examined. The child's needs are (1) quality of teachers/providers, (2) safety, (3) number of toys available to children, (4) cleanliness, (5) quality, (6) nutritious meals/snacks, (7) cleanliness (8) program goals, and (9) stability of staff.

Teacher qualifications and program goals were also incorporated in the survey. The program goals that were looked at were as follows: (1) training in socialization, (2) therapy and help in assisting with emotional needs of the child, (3) the mission statement, (4) basic learning (teaching the alphabet, numbers, colors, etc.), (5) development of creativity over a wide range of situations, (6) physical care, (7) health of the child and (8) kindergarten readiness. The teacher qualifications were (1) any special talents the teacher may have, (2) experience with young children, (3) average number of years in the child

care industry, (4) time worked at this particular center, (5) academic training (high school, college, or beyond), (6) liking for children, (7) and if the teacher has any children of her own. A total of 28 outcomes measures were examined.

The parents rated the importance of each component from what was least important to them in choosing a childcare center to most important, with 1 being the least important and 5 being the most.

The parents also answered questions regarding additional programs brought into the center and their feelings toward those, and if they felt they were getting their money's worth. Parents were asked to respond to any issue that had not been covered.

Procedure

Surveys were distributed to all of the parents who have children in the local childcare center. The surveys were placed in the child's cubby where the parent goes every day to pick up their child's belongings and artwork. The parents had one week to complete the survey. A reminder notice was sent home after the survey had been distributed for one week. The parents sent the consent form back in a self-addressed envelope provided to them. When the survey was completed, the parents returned it in the survey envelope to the main office. All responses were held confidential.

Results

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were derived from each of the 28 items stated above to determine which is most important. Also, a One-Way MANOVA was used to compare the toddler (one and two-year-olds), preschool (three and four-year-olds), kindergarten (five-year-olds), after school (older than five-years-old), and more than one child attending center groups as to

what is most and least important to parents on the 28 dependent variables stated above. The group "more than one child attending center" refers to parents who have two or more children of different ages attending center. A Repeated-Measures t -test was used to yield information on comparing parent needs versus child needs.

Descriptives

Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the means, standard deviations, and percentages of the parents choosing "important" and "most important." Table 3 represents those means, standard deviations, and percentages of the responses given by the parents on how important each item was to them in choosing this particular childcare center. Percentages reflect those parents who answered a 4 or 5 on the Likert Scale provided (see Table 3). The three most important criteria, using the means, stated by parents were safety, cleanliness, and the presence of an educational program. The lowest criteria rated were the toys available to the children, being recommended by a friend, location, and the cost of tuition.

Table 4 represents the means, standard deviations, and percentages of the responses by parents in regards to the items relating to program goals. Again, the percentages reflect those parents who answered 4 or 5 on the Likert scale. Developing creativity and incorporating basic learning were important to most parents, while using the means, while kindergarten readiness was not rated as highly (see Table 4.)

Table 5 displays the means, standard deviations, and percentages of the responses in regards to teacher qualifications. Percentages are derived the same as in the previous tables. By using the means, more parents rated educational training and whether the teacher likes children more highly than any other criteria for teacher qualifications,

whereas teachers having children of their own was not rated as important (see Table 5.)

I did not use the rank data because the parents did not follow the directions correctly, which made for inaccurate information. As for the comments made in the open-ended question section, the responses given varied too much to put them in specific categories, except for the question regarding value, "Are you getting value for the cost of tuition?" 88.9% of the parents surveyed reported that they were getting value, while the remaining 11.1% were not.

Differences Across Groups

A One-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance was conducted to compare the toddler ($n=3$), two-year-olds ($n=6$), preschool ($n=13$), kindergarten ($n=7$), after school ($n=4$), and more than one child in the center ($n=11$) groups as to what is most and least important to parents. The dependent variables were cost, location, educational program, hours of operation, recommendations from friends/relatives, quality of teachers, safety, cleanliness, program goals, agreement in values between center and parents, reliability, amount of toys available to the children, interaction between staff and parents, stability of staff, and nutritious meals. There was a significant difference found, $F(80, 110) = 1.501$, $p < .05$.

A One-Way Analysis of Variance was then done on each of the variables stated above. There were only two that showed significant differences, safety, $F(5, 110) = 2.467$, $p < .05$, and program goals, $F(5, 110) = 3.682$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc Bonferroni found that the parents of kindergarten children stated that these items were not as important to them as the other items that were asked about compared to the parents of two-year-olds, $p < .05$.

A One-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance was also conducted to determine if

there was a difference between groups regarding program goals as to what is most and least important to parents. The variables that were used under program goals were socialization with other children, assistance with emotional needs, basic learning concepts (ABC's, numbers, etc.), creative development, and kindergarten readiness. There were no reported significant differences between each group of children, $F(25, 180) = .79$, NS.

The last MANOVA was performed to see if there were differences in the importance of teacher qualifications across groups. The variables that were used under teacher qualifications were any special talents the teacher has, teachers' experience with young children, number of years in the childcare industry, numbers of years at this particular center, any educational training, if she likes children, or has any of her own. There were, again, no significant differences amongst the groups, $F(35, 170) = 1.29$, NS.

Parents' Needs Versus Childs' Needs

Two scales were developed by averaging the scores of several variables. The Parent's Needs Scale consisted of cost, location, hours of operation, recommendations from friends or relatives, agreement in values, reliability, and interaction between staff and parents. The Child's Needs Scale consisted of educational program, quality of teachers/providers, safety, cleanliness, quality, program goals, toys available to Children, nutritious meals, and stability of staff. An inter-item reliability test, Cronbach's Alpha, was done to ensure reliability of these two scales. The alpha score for the Parent Needs Scale was .66. The alpha for the Child Needs Scale was .85. After doing this, a repeated measures t-test was done to compare Parent Needs and Child Needs to see which parents rated more important in choosing a childcare center. There was a significant difference between the two scales, $t(40) = -9.68$, $p < .05$. Parents rated child needs ($M = 4.59$, $SD =$

.38) significantly higher than parent needs ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .5$).

Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that there is little question that parents put childrens' needs above their own when it comes to childcare. The most important factors in deciding on a childcare alternative were safety, the importance of an educational program, and cleanliness, while the least important were being recommended by a friend, the toys available to the children, location, and the cost of tuition. This is surprising since two of the major factors in the literature in choosing a childcare alternative are cost and location. This study contradicts what most other research suggests as being the most important factors in deciding on a childcare arrangement (Atkinson, 1987; Herscovitch, 1996; Hofferth et al., 1991; & Lein, 1979). These parents rated cost and location as being important, but not as important as all the other factors being analyzed. Parents took cost and location into account after the child's needs were met.

A majority of the parents enrolling their children at this particular center have more than a high school diploma. Because of this, the average salary is higher than those parents only having a high school education. These parents are able to pay more for childcare and therefore get higher quality care. Higher quality care typically costs more than other childcare alternatives (Hair-Hunts, 1994; Hofferth et al., 1991; Kisker et al., 1996; Lein, 1979; Scarr, 1998). Parents who pay more for childcare typically choose center-based care (Hair-Hunts, 1994). The center used in this study is not an average priced center, but one of the most expensive in the area. Because of this, a majority of the families attending this center have a higher income than most households. For future research, it may be necessary to look at other centers and other childcare arrangements to

see if there are parallel findings and if income level does play a part in choosing facilities.

Program goals and safety were the only variables that showed a significance difference between the kindergarten and two-year-old groups. The parents of the kindergarteners were not as concerned with the safety and program goals of the center as the parents of two-year-olds. The two-year-old's parents are mainly concerned that their child's behaviors are able to be controlled and that the child is able to control them. These parents are more concerned that their children are safe and well-taken care of, as opposed to having a structured learning environment. Safety and program goals work together in doing this. Two-year-olds need to have more supervision than the kindergarteners. By being closely supervised, the children will remain safe and develop the skills necessary to keep themselves and those around them safe. After the two-year-olds learn the skills to stay safe, other skills such as learning to listen and follow directions will be enhanced. At age five, the children should already be able to control their behaviors and do not need as much supervision. As these kindergarteners go off to an elementary school, the safety and the goals of that institution may become more important to the parents as they may spend the next six years attending there.

There were no differences across groups in relation to program goals and teacher qualifications. The variables that were rated most important were that basic learning skills be provided to the children and supplying them with kindergarten readiness skills prior to entering kindergarten. Parents are looking for more than just a babysitter. They do not just want someone watching their child. They feel their child is there to be well taken care of, as well as getting the education needed to go on to a primary institution successfully. As far as teacher qualifications go, the parents want their child's teacher to

like children in general. What parents did not rate as highly as expected is the amount of time the provider has been at this particular center. I find this disturbing. One of the determinants in acknowledging a high quality center is the amount of turnover in a center. The lower turnover is related to a higher quality of center (Scarr, 1998). If the teacher/provider has not been at a center for an extended period of time, then the possibility of turnover is high and the quality of the center may be in question. It is possible that the parents may not see the connection. They may just be concerned with the present since it deals with their child first hand. They might not care about the center's past since they were not part of it. (Herscovitch 1996; Johansen, 1992). The

government There were a few things regarding this study that could have altered its findings. The first was that there were no infant parents who responded to the survey. Typically, the quality of infant care has been found to be the poorest of each age group in previous research (Burchinal et al., 1996). Only about half of the licensed centers in the United States provide infant care. Having infant's parents' input may have had a bearing on what parents want from a childcare center overall and could help future centers provide the necessary care. child is not receiving them, then the parent will find other arrangements

where A relatively low number of surveys were returned for this study. Having no infant responses could have contributed to the low number of surveys that were returned. Although there were enough to get significant results, more surveys would have yielded possibly stronger or more accurate outcomes. ices. The owner of this center will be able

to use This center's tuition is considerably high in comparison to the other centers in the area. Being an expensive place to send children, this limits the population of parents who can afford it. Perhaps looking at other centers that have different tuition rates would give

a more clear picture of what exactly parents want for their children from a childcare center. *the succession of opening more childcare centers.*

Additional research could answer a few other questions. Income is one. Since the parents at this center were not concerned with the cost of tuition, are other parents? Looking at other childcare arrangements, rather than just licensed childcare centers, is necessary to extend this research. Do lower income parents put their needs first or their child's? Do lower income families have further limits than what is affordable to them? This is extremely likely since their salaries are limited and again, higher quality of care goes along with higher tuition prices (Herscovitch 1996; Johansen, 1992). The government gives aid to those families who qualify, but does this limit some families in the opportunity to send their children to a high quality childcare center? All children should have the same opportunities to get the best care provided to them.

It would also be beneficial to do further, more intensive research on each of the age groups to see exactly what it is these parents look for for their children. This study focused on what parents want overall. Developmentally, each child has his/her own needs. And if the child is not receiving them, then the parent will find other arrangements where the child can receive them. This center is a for-profit organization, so the importance of keeping parents and children happy is vital.

The results will be disclosed to the owner so he may be able to meet the needs of the community better and the families he services. The owner of this center will be able to use these results in order to keep his business growing. His primary goal is to keep his center fully enrolled, and in order to do this he needs to be sure he is supplying what the families want and need. The results from this study will give him a good overall view on

what the parents using his center are looking for in a childcare center. This in turn will aid in the succession of opening more childcare centers.

If childcare centers want to keep their enrollments high, then it is imperative that the parents' needs are met, regardless of what they are. In doing this, each and every center needs make every effort to provide a high quality center and to provide the children attending every opportunity to foster development and growth.

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Table 1

Percentage of Parents' Educational Levels

Schooling	Percentage
Some High School	2.2
High School Diploma	13.0
Some College	21.7
College Degree	34.8
Some Graduate Work	10.9
Graduate Degree or Higher	17.4

Table 2

Percentage of Parental Income Levels

Income Level	N	Percentage	Mean	SD	% Choosing Important or Most Important
\$5,001-\$15,000	42	4.4	3.00	.963	24.6
\$15,001-\$25,000	44	13.3	3.66	.776	86.4
\$25,001-\$35,000	44	8.9	3.68	.983	63.7
\$35,001-\$50,000	44	8.9	3.39	.945	47.3
\$50,001-\$75,000	44	26.7	4.07	.998	79.5
\$75,001-Higher		33.3			
Recommendation	44		4.34	.776	86.4
Agreement in Values	44		4.45	.697	88.6
Program Goals	44		4.50	.629	92.8
Interaction Between Staff and Parents	44		4.55	.627	93.2
Quality of Teachers	43		4.63	.635	90.7
Nutritious Meals	44		4.66	.568	95.5
Educational Program	44		4.75	.488	97.8
Cleanliness	44		4.77	.476	97.7

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Percentages of Responses Given by Parents

Variable	<u>N</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	% Choosing Important or Most Important
Recommendation	42	3.00	.963	28.6
Toy Availability	44	3.66	.776	86.4
Location	44	3.68	.983	63.7
Cost	44	3.39	.945	47.7
Hours of Operation	44	4.07	.998	79.5
Reliability	44	4.34	.776	86.4
Agreement in Values	44	4.45	.697	88.6
Program Goals	44	4.50	.629	92.8
Interaction Between Staff and Parents	44	4.55	.627	93.2
Quality of Teachers	43	4.63	.655	90.7
Nutritious Meals	44	4.66	.568	95.5
Educational Program	44	4.75	.488	97.8
Cleanliness	44	4.77	.476	97.7

Table 4

Quality	44	4.82	.495	95.5
Safety	44	4.86	.409	97.7

Assistance with Emotional Needs	44	4.52	.628	93.2
Socialization with Children	44	4.55	.627	93.2
Creative Development	44	4.59	.542	97.8
Kindergarten Readiness	44	4.61	.689	88.6
Basic Learning	44	4.64	.574	95.5

Table 4

Responses Pertaining to Program Goals

Program Goal	<u>N</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	% Choosing Important or Most Important
Assistance with Emotional Needs	44	4.52	.628	93.2
Socialization with Children	44	4.55	.627	93.2
Creative Development	44	4.59	.542	97.8
Kindergarten Readiness	44	4.61	.689	88.6
Basic Learning	44	4.64	.574	95.5

Table 5

Responses Pertaining to Teacher Qualifications

Teacher Quality	<u>N</u>	Mean	<u>SD</u>	% Choosing Important or Most Important
Has Children of Own	44	2.48	1.31	18.1
Years at Center	44	3.1	.970	86.4
Special Talent	44	3.89	.868	80.5
No. Years in Industry	44	3.98	.731	59.1
Educational Training	44	4.36	.718	100
Experience with Children	44	4.59	.497	82.7
Likes Children	44	4.89	.321	100

Appendix A

Parents' Wants and Needs Questionnaire

Childcare is being used by more families today than ever before. Childcare can be made more useful and beneficial to families if it is known what is needed and wanted by the parents. Please take a few moments to fill out the following questionnaire, so in the future your needs can better be served. All data will be held confidential, so please do not put any names on the forms. Your compliance is greatly appreciated and thank you for your cooperation. Please turn in completed forms in the plain attached envelope to the center director.

What is the gender of the person filling out this survey? _____

What is your highest level of schooling? Please circle your answer.

- a) Some high school
- b) High school diploma/equivalent
- c) Some college
- d) College degree
- e) Some graduate work
- f) Graduate degree or higher

How many children are in your family? _____

How many children attend this childcare center? _____

What are their ages and gender? (example: boy, 7 years) _____

How many days a week do your children attend? _____

Are they part-time or full-time? _____

What is your annual family income? Please circle your answer.

- a) Under \$5,000
- b) \$5,001 - \$15,000
- c) \$15,001 - 25,000
- d) \$25,001 - 35,000
- e) \$35,001 - 50,000
- f) \$50,001 - 75,000
- g) \$75,001 - higher

What is your marital status? (married, single, divorced, etc..) _____

Using the following scale, please rate the **importance** to you and your family the

following components in choosing a child care center.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

What were you looking for in choosing this particular center?
through 3, 1 to 5

very
important

- _____ Cost
- _____ Location
- _____ Educational program
- _____ Hours of operation
- _____ Recommended by a friend/relative
- _____ Qualifications of teachers/providers
- _____ Safety
- _____ Cleanliness
- _____ Quality
- _____ Program goals
- _____ Parents and center agree in values
- _____ Reliability - can always count on center being open
- _____ Toys available to children
- _____ Interaction between staff and parents
- _____ Stability of staff (low staff turnover)
- _____ Nutritious meals

Please rate the **importance** of the program goals and teacher qualifications to you and your family using the following scale.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

not at all
important

very
important

Program Goals

- _____ Socialization with other children
- _____ Assistance with emotional needs of your children
- _____ Basic learning (alphabet, numbers, colors, etc.)
- _____ Developing creativity in children
- _____ Kindergarten readiness

Teacher Qualifications

- _____ Special talents teacher holds
- _____ Experience with young children
- _____ Number of years in child care industry
- _____ Number of years at this particular center
- _____ Educational training

- ☐ Likes children
☐ Has children of own

What were your **3 main reasons** for choosing this particular center? Please label them 1 through 3, **1 being most important**.

Objective

- ☐ Cost
☐ Location
☐ Educational program
☐ Hours
☐ Recommended by friend
 Education ☐ Qualifications of teachers/providers
☐ Safety and cleanliness
☐ Quality
☐ Program goals
☐ Parents and center agree in values
☐ Reliability - can always count on center being open
☐ Toys available to children
☐ Nutritious meals

Was a licensed child care center your first choice of a child care arrangement?

Circle yes or no. Yes No _____ If not, what was your first choice of child care? (example: child center care, family member, home care, church facility, etc.)?

When answering the following questions, please feel free to use the back if more space is needed.

Experience

Do you feel you are getting value for the cost of tuition? Why or why not?

What is one thing that you like or enjoy about this particular childcare center?

If you could change one thing regarding this particular center, what would it be?

Lori Kerr
3441 Glenn Oak Drive
South Bend, IN 46628
(574) 277-2062
Email: MLKERR@MSN.COM

Objective

To use my experience, schooling, and background to my fullest potential.

Education

BA, May, 1994, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana
Major: Psychology, Minor: Speech and Hearing

MA, May, 2002, Indiana University, South Bend, Indiana
Major: Applied Psychology

- *Thesis: "Parents Wants and Needs From a Child Care Center".*
- *Completed 2 classroom evaluations for local childcare center for their NAEYC accreditation*
- *Member of Psi Chi National Honor Society, inducted June 1999*
- *Presented workshops pertaining to Parent Communication, Classroom Management, Developmentally Age-Appropriate Activities, and Discipline*

Experience

Director in Training, Director, Children's Discovery Center, Elkhart, Indiana (December, 1997-May, 2000). Started as a Director in Training. Responsible for curriculum development, staff training, enrolling new students and families, tours, and running of center when director was not available. Also was the pre-k teacher for that duration. Became director July, 1999. Responsible for daily running and upkeep of center and its activities, in addition to payroll, keeping a budget, hiring and firing employees, paid bills, bought supplies, maintained and raised tuition payments when necessary. Planned summer camp schedule and substituted in classrooms when needed to keep ratio. Oversaw 15 employees and approximately 85 children and their families (children ages 6 weeks through 12 years). Attended several workshops and meetings to improve skills. Prepared and presented workshops on discipline and communication amongst staff, parents, as well as children. Responsible for keeping center licensed under Indiana regulations.

Classroom Teacher, Growing Kids Learning Center, South Bend, Indiana (January, 1996-November, 1999). Taught in preschool classroom, ages 3 through 4. In the classroom I was responsible for preparing and implementing a thematic unit in which gross and fine motor, art, language, social, cognitive, and self-help skills were enhanced. Prepared and scheduled parent teacher conferences. Met with group of teachers to develop parent/teacher conference forms. Kept parent communication open and strong. Outside of classroom was responsible for balancing and tracking the petty cash money throughout center. Prepared and presented workshop on maintaining good parent communication and its benefit. Became opening supervisor. Gave tours when needed. Responsible for running center in morning hours and calling substitutes when needed. Held practical interviews in classroom.

Case Manager, Madison Center, South Bend, Indiana (August 1995-December 1995). Worked with the Children's Day treatment Program. Had a caseload of 10-15 children and their families. Conducted assessments and prepared and implemented treatment plans to meet the needs and goals of each family and their children. Filled out progress notes on each contact with a certain party. Aided families in registering for welfare programs, enrolling their children in school, and assisted families in keeping appointments. Also referred families to nonprofit organizations for help during the holiday season. Kept close contact with the child's teachers, doctors, therapists, families, and any other party involved with the well-being of the child.

Currently working part-time at The Children's Place and raising my child.

References available upon request